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ABSTRACT

This monograph offers guidelines that address issues in the inclusion of students with disabilities in national, state, and district educational assessment programs. Assessments are viewed as the foundation of educational accountability systems and thus the key to efforts for educational reform. Specific criteria for reviewing, revising, and/or evaluating assessment guidelines for student participation, accommodation, and reporting are provided. The guide urges a hands-on approach to examining and/or revising state and district guidelines about accountability, large-scale assessments, and students with disabilities. The document first provides an overview of immediate and past practice in participation, accommodation, and reporting of students with disabilities in state and national assessments. It then offers specific criteria for making decisions concerning participation, accommodation, and reporting of assessment results for students with disabilities. The criteria markers in existing state guidelines are examined for whether or not they provide specific examples of policies that promote the participation of students with disabilities in assessments. Assessment accommodations in four categories (presentation, time/scheduling, student response, and test setting) are suggested. Appended are three checklists for participation decisions, accommodations decisions, and reporting assessment results. (DB)

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Synthesis Report 25

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Assessment Guidelines that Maximize the Participation of Students with Disabilities in Large-Scale Assessments:

Characteristics and Considerations

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In collaboration with:

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)

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Assessment Guidelines that Maximize the Participation of Students with Disabilities in Large-Scale Assessments:

Characteristics and Considerations

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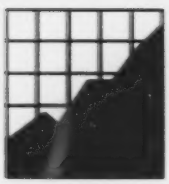
October 1996



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Executive Summary

The exclusion of students with disabilities from national, state, and district assessments must be addressed now. Assessments are the foundation of educational accountability systems, the key impetus for change in the current push for educational reform. Related issues that must be addressed include assessment accommodations for students who need them, and accounting for the learning of all students. Specific criteria for reviewing, revising, and/or evaluating assessment guidelines for student participation, accommodation, and reporting are provided. This document provides:

- An overview of immediate and past practice in participation, accommodation, and reporting of students with disabilities in state and national assessments.
- Criteria for making decisions around participation, accommodation, and reporting of assessment results for students with disabilities.
- Examples and nonexamples of criteria markers in existing state guidelines.
- A short list of assessment accommodations in four categories.
- A hands-on approach to examining and/or revising state and district guidelines about accountability, large-scale assessments, and students with disabilities.

Attaining Accountability for All Students

As a nation, the United States is moving rapidly toward results-based accountability systems. More and more, states are producing public reports on student performance (CCSSO, 1995), and more and more states are attaching consequences to documented student performance levels (Bond, Braskamp, & Roeber, 1996). Parents, community members, and policy decision makers want and need to know how well all students are learning in America's schools. Included in the word "all" are students with disabilities.

It has been estimated that approximately 85% of students with disabilities are able to participate in national and state assessments.

The exclusion of students with disabilities from national and state assessments has become an issue of much concern within the past five years, particularly because these assessments are the foundation of educational accountability systems. During this time, we have come to realize that neither our national assessment programs nor most statewide assessment programs provide good data on students with disabilities. The reason for this, in the majority of cases, is that students with disabilities are not included in the assessments (McGrew, Thurlow, Shriner, & Spiegel, 1992). While many of these assessments may not be appropriate for a small percentage of students (estimated to be less than 2% of the student population), a large percentage of the excluded students is capable of taking the assessments. It has been estimated that approximately 85% of students with disabilities, many of whom have been excluded from assessments, are able to participate with or without accommodations (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, McGrew, & Shriner, 1994).

When we think about students with disabilities and large-scale assessments, we refer to three types of students–those who are capable of taking the assessment without accommodation, those who are capable of taking the assessment with accommodation, and those who will need a different assessment (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, McGrew, & Vanderwood, 1994). Simply recognizing these types has not necessarily translated into students with disabilities participating at higher rates, being provided needed

assessment accommodations, or being represented in reports of assessment results (Erickson, Thurlow, Thor, & Seyfarth, 1996).

There are many reasons why students with disabilities have been excluded (see Ysseldyke, Thurlow, McGrew, & Vanderwood, 1994). However, a large percentage of exclusions can be attributed to vague guidelines about participation in assessments, use of accommodations, and the reporting of results. Guidelines that exist do not provide decision makers, usually the IEP team, with enough information to make informed decisions about who should participate in specific assessments. Furthermore, there is no system to monitor the integrity of implementation of such decisions.

In some cases, the unavailability of accommodations, or the lack of willingness to provide them, has led to exclusion of students with disabilities. People have explained these exclusions with excuses like "we have never done this before" or "we simply don't have the means to provide that accommodation." Accommodations are viewed as raising logistical issues that people would prefer to avoid. Exclusion has been taken as the easier and less complicated avenue than accommodation. Indeed, providing accommodations to special needs students does introduce some logistical challenges, but often fewer than imagined. There are important questions, however, for which people need guidelines to answer: Who gets assessment accommodations? How are they implemented? Who implements them?

It is not uncommon to exclude students with disabilities in the reporting of results (Thurlow, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1995a, 1995b), even when they are assessed. In fact, some students with disabilities are allowed to take the assessment, but their protocols are destroyed or shared only with those students' parents. Often there is no record of performance on any district or state assessment in the student's cumulative file.

The issues of participation, accommodation, and reporting are both political and attitudinal. The overarching issue is one of accountability for students in America's schools. What accountability system do students with

disabilities belong to if they are not in the one that "all" students belong to? Are they learning? How do we know? What is the relationship of participation, accommodation, and reporting to standards, instruction, and assessment?

There is great variation in numbers and types of assessments that states employ, numbers of students assessed, and purposes of the assessments (Bond & Roeber, 1996). In 1995, 43 states had assessment guidelines for participation and accommodation (Thurlow, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1995a, 1995b). These guidelines exhibit tremendous variability. For example, assessment accommodations may vary as a function of the assessment. Accommodations that one state allows another may prohibit. Participation guidelines also vary. Some states automatically exclude students by category of disability, amount of time spent in the mainstream, or simply because they have IEPs.

What accountability system do students with disabilities belong to if they are not in the one that "all" students belong to?

Most decisions about participation and accommodations are made by IEP teams at the building and district levels. Variability in guidelines, their interpretation, and their implementation is a major contributor to the inability to make comparisons across schools and districts. Difficulties in comparing states using a single national assessment (National Assessment of Educational Progress–NAEP) also can be traced to differences in participation rates from one state to the next (Anderson, Jenkins, & Miller, 1996; National Academy of Education, 1992, 1996). The need for a more consistent framework across states is becoming increasingly obvious.

The purpose of this report is to provide a hands-on approach to examining and/or revising state and district guidelines about accountability, large-scale assessments, and students with disabilities. It provides a set of criteria to consider when setting or revising assessment policy about who takes assessments, with what accommodations, and how the results are reported.

The criteria included in this report have been shared with numerous stakeholders in both general and special education and from a variety of perspectives (e.g., local directors, state directors, organizations). The

criteria are to serve as guideposts to policies for making decisions about assessment. They were developed as a result of an initial analysis of the guidelines that states sent to NCEO. In examining states' guidelines and the variability among them (e.g., one line to 60 pages of text), the need to identify essential elements became apparent. The criteria reflect what accountability and assessment policies should address in state and district guidelines about assessment for "all" students, including students with disabilities.

We start by examining what we know about states' current guidelines in each of the three areas–participation, accommodation, and reporting. The next section presents our proposed criteria for appropriate guidelines and markers of appropriateness. Finally, we offer examples and nonexamples of inclusive guidelines from anonymous states' written guidelines and policy documents on assessment.

Characteristics of Existing Accountability and Assessment Guidelines

The criteria and markers that we present in this paper are based on analyses of state guidelines and several years of experience identifying and addressing issues related to the participation of students with disabilities in assessments and accountability systems, the use of accommodations during assessments, and the aggregation of data and reporting of results. In this section, we highlight some of the issues and trends in each of these area.

Participation

There are several issues to address and a number of recent trends evident in policies about who participates in large-scale assessments (see Thurlow, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1995b). These trends fall into eight categories: (a) function of the IEP, (b) role of parents, (c) issues of partial testing, (d) the extent to which decisions are based on category of disability, setting, or placement, (e) assessing what is taught, (f) high versus low stakes assessments, (g) alternate or different assessment, and (h) reporting of the

assessment results. Each of these is discussed in greater detail by Thurlow, Scott, and Ysseldyke (1995b).

In brief, we found that 32 states use the IEP as the final decision guideline for participation. In 25 of these states, the IEP document must indicate whether the student is to participate in the statewide assessment. Sixteen states refer to the direct involvement of parents in decisions about participation in statewide assessments. In four states where there are high stakes tests for students (e.g., student must pass exam to receive a diploma), some IEPs must show proof that the parent/guardian understands the possible consequences of exemption from the assessment.

The notion of partial assessment has been addressed by several states. This refers to the practice of allowing a student to take part of a test (e.g., take the math subtest but not the reading subtest). Of nine states that include partial assessment as an option, seven specifically recommend partial testing, three specifically prohibit it. Participation decisions based on category of disability, setting or placement are used in 15 states. However, several other states use guidelines that mirror the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) which, through 1994, included criteria involving time in academic subjects in mainstream settings, complicated by language about the student being "incapable of taking part meaningfully" in the assessment. The three states that refer to category of disability for automatic exemption from the assessments do not necessarily refer to the same categories.

Assessing what is taught is a variable that is addressed in several states. In most states, caution is advised, with the suggestion that assessment of students with disabilities is not appropriate if the assessment does not measure what the student has been taught. This raises many questions about the opportunity that students with disabilities have for exposure to the same content areas that they would if they were not classified. If a student with a disability is not taught the same information as other students, one might infer that the student is in a separate curriculum, but this is not always

the case. If it is, an important question is why the student is in a different curriculum. And, who is accountable for that student's learning?

In 1995, 17 states required students to pass an exit exam in order to receive a graduation diploma (Bond & Roeber, 1995; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Anderson, 1995). These are high stakes assessments for the student. In most states, the IEP or instructional planning team is responsible for assuring that the student has the opportunity to be taught the content that will be measured. Many states offer an alternative certificate of completion or an IEP diploma for those students not trying to pass the exit exam. However, this does not mean that a student with a disability automatically should be getting an alternative exit document; many students with disabilities are capable of attaining standard diplomas.

There is large variability among states in terminology and classification schemes for accommodations.

A few states have now or are developing alternate forms of assessment for those students for whom the regular state assessment is deemed inappropriate. That is, the procedures of administration are inappropriate for some students, thus revealing a need for an assessment that will measure the students' true performance. Before exploring the alternate assessment, however, it is critical that as many students as possible be included in the regular assessment.

Accommodations

The compilation of states' guidelines on accommodations in assessments (Thurlow, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1995a) illustrated not only that they are extremely variable in length, ranging from one sentence to 60 pages, but also that they are contradictory (what one state allows, another may prohibit). There is also variability among states in terminology and classification schemes. Among terms used to convey the concept of accommodations in different states are: modification, mediation, alteration, and adaptation. And, the same term may be used to mean different things, or different terms may be used to mean the same thing. The classification of accommodations can be organized into four categories: (1) Presentation, (2) Response, (3) Setting, (4) Timing or Scheduling (see Figure 1). Within

each of these areas, subcategories may exist to reflect assistive devices to be considered for use by the student.

Figure 1. Categories and Examples of Accommodations

Presentation:

- Increase size of answer bubbles
- Highlight key words or phrases in directions
- Read directions to student
- Provide audiotaped administration of sections
- Read questions aloud to student

Student Response:

- Provide wider lines and/or wider margins
- Allow student to mark responses in booklet rather than on answer sheet
- Provide word processor
- Provide copy assistance between drafts
- Provide calculator

Time/Scheduling:

- Extend the time allotted to complete the test
- Administer the test in several sessions, specify duration
- Allow frequent breaks during testing

Test Setting:

- Provide special lighting
- Provide adaptive or special furniture
- Allow testing in a small group, study carrel, or individually

The general trends that have been identified for assessment accommodations guidelines fall into seven general categories: (a) IEP function, (b) requirements for documentation of the use of accommodations, (c) use of the same accommodations for assessment as for instruction, (d) acceptability of specific accommodations, (e) allowance of the use of accommodations by students without disabilities, (f) out-of-level testing,

and (g) reporting of results. Each of these are described in greater detail in Thurlow, Scott, and Ysseldyke (1995a).

As in states' guidelines about participation decisions, we found that IEP teams were key decision makers in deciding who receives assessment accommodations and the nature of those accommodations. Twenty-two states indicated that the IEP team makes accommodation decisions. Some states require a statement about the specific accommodations to be used during statewide assessments. Others do not specify which accommodations are to be used or with which specific tests. In many states, there is not a requirement that these decisions be recorded on the IEP document; however, four states specifically require that the use of assessment accommodations be documented somewhere in addition to on the IEP. There are states that require a request for assessment accommodations be made and prior written approval given, by the state superintendent's office, before the time of testing.

For every instance that a state specifies that an accommodation is acceptable, another state may prohibit it.

More than ever before, states are beginning to look at how assessment accommodations link to those accommodations used during instruction. Fourteen states indicate the need to allow during assessment the same accommodations that are used in instruction. Most states are clear in indicating that accommodations should not be introduced for the first time at the time of the assessment. Accommodations to be used by the student should be those that the student is familiar with and has used prior to test administration. Other states' guidelines discuss the purpose of assessment accommodations as the need to provide students with disabilities the opportunity to demonstrate skill and knowledge without being limited or impeded by their disability (e.g., leveling the playing field, providing equal opportunity, giving equal footing).

There are virtually no accommodations that have universal acceptance by states. In fact, for every instance that a state specifies that an accommodation is acceptable, another state may prohibit it. For example, at least 15 states allow the use of a scribe during assessment, whereas at least one other state prohibits it.

More and more people are asking "why are students with disabilities the only ones eligible for accommodations?" Allowing the use of assessment accommodations by other students has begun to be discussed in some states. Five states have provisions in their guidelines for making accommodations for students who need them, regardless of whether they have IEPs. Other states specifically indicate that those students who have temporary physical injuries are the only students, other than students with disabilities, who are allowed assessment accommodations.

Out-of-level testing is specifically addressed in written guidelines by a few states. Some states allow students to be tested at their instructional level, while others allow testing to be postponed until the student has completed the course of study on which the test is based.

Decisions about whose results are reported, how they are reported, and to whom, have surfaced as an overarching issue of accountability and assessment.

Reporting

The final area for which NCEO has developed criteria reflects the need to establish a more inclusive policy for reporting the results of assessment. Reporting is an area that is now being carefully examined by most states. While the issues of participation and accommodation have received much discussion and attention in the recent past, decisions about whose results are reported, how they are reported, and to whom, have surfaced as an overarching issue of accountability and assessment. Many states refer only generally to the issue of reporting in their assessment guidelines. While NCEO did not specifically ask for policies on reporting of assessment results, these policies were evident in many states' participation and accommodation guidelines.

In the area of reporting, 24 states describe what they do with data on students with disabilities (Thurlow et al., 1995b). More than half of these states (n=14) include in their guidelines that data from students with disabilities are not included in their reports. However, eight states do document the number of students excluded from the assessments.

The topic of reporting assessment results is also found in some states' guidelines for accommodations. The mere use of assessment

accommodations on district and state tests introduces reporting issues in many states. These are heightened when high stakes tests are used. It is not uncommon for those students with disabilities who do participate in assessments to have their scores deleted, their results shared only with parents, or no record kept of their even taking the test. These things often occur more frequently if the student used an accommodation during the assessment.

States make decisions about reporting based on whether a student received an accommodation and sometimes of the basis of the kind of accommodation used. Some states disaggregate results by students with disabilities who received accommodations or any student who took the assessment under nonstandard conditions. Others disaggregate by type of accommodation used.

It is not uncommon for students with disabilities to be excluded from calculations of assessment participation rates.

One issue of reporting is centered around who is included when the participation rate for the assessment is calculated. It is not uncommon for students with disabilities to be excluded from this calculation, accommodated or not (Erickson, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1996). Some states exclude only those students who received accommodations. Yet other states start with the number of students with disabilities who are eligible to participate in the assessment and use this number to reflect all students with disabilities. For example, District A has 500 students with disabilities. After participation decisions are made (usually by the IEP team), only 150 students with disabilities will take the assessment. District A then reports that 90% of students with disabilities passed the assessment. Using these results, District A appears not only inclusive in its assessment program, but programmatically meeting the needs of students with disabilities; however, a closer look begs the question "ninety percent of what number?" The reality is that approximately one-third of all students with disabilities in the district actually took the test. What about the other 350 students with disabilities who did not take the assessment?

The reporting of assessment results can have a significant impact on school buildings and districts. Many bond issues are won or lost based on how

well students do on the assessments. Districts and states are constantly compared to each other and the media often show no mercy in their displays of results. Therefore, there are incentives for school buildings and districts to selectively report the results of assessment. Because of the inconsistency in the reporting of assessment results, it is apparent that, even if participation and accommodations are maximized, there will continue to be problems in interpreting results unless reporting issues are addressed.

Criteria and Markers for Appropriate Written Guidelines

Inconsistency in the reporting of assessment results continues to be a problem in interpreting results.

NCEO proposes a set of three criteria for policies about the assessment of students with disabilities in district and statewide assessments. Existing guidelines can be examined in terms of the extent to which they maximize the participation of students with disabilities in accountability systems and assessments. NCEO has identified three aspects of written guidelines that can be evaluated: participation, accommodations, and reporting of results.

> **Criterion 1:** State or district has appropriate written guidelines for the **participation** of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments used for accountability purposes.
>
> **Criterion 2:** State or district has appropriate written guidelines for the use of **accommodations** by students with disabilities in large-scale assessments for accountability purposes.
>
> **Criterion 3:** State or district has appropriate written guidelines for **reporting** the results of students with disabilities on large-scale assessments used for accountability purposes.

Each of these criteria can be made more explicit through the identification of markers against which written documents can be evaluated. In the

following section, we present the criteria with markers. Together, these can guide the development and revision of policies for inclusive assessment and accountability systems.

CRITERION 1: State or district has appropriate written guidelines for the participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments used for accountability purposes.

Markers for Criterion 1. The written guidelines include statements that indicate:

1. Premise exists that all students, including all students with disabilities, are to participate in the district or state accountability system.

2. Decision about participation is made by a person (or a group of people) who knows the student.

3. Decision about participation is based on the student's current level of functioning and learning characteristics.

4. Form is used that lists the variables to consider in making participation decisions.

5. Reason(s) for exclusion are documented.

6. Student must participate in an assessment if the student receives <u>any</u> instruction on content assessed, regardless of where instruction occurs.

7. Decision about participation is <u>not</u> based on program setting, category of disability, or percentage of time in the mainstream classroom.

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8. Decision about participation allows for some students to participate in an alternate assessment or, when appropriate, in part of an assessment or assessment procedure.

9. Decision guidelines recognize that only a small percentage of students with disabilities need to participate in an alternate assessment (e.g., those with severe disabilities, about one to two percent of all students) or, when appropriate, to participate in a part of an assessment or assessment procedure.

10. Parents understand participation options and implications of their child **not** being included in an assessment or accountability system.

11. Decision about participation is documented on the student's IEP or on an additional form that is attached to the IEP.

These criteria are reflected in the checklist provided in Appendix A.

CRITERION 2: State or district has appropriate written guidelines for the use of accommodations by students with disabilities in large-scale assessments used for accountability purposes.

Markers for Criterion 2. The written guidelines include statements that indicate:

1. Decision about accommodations is made by a person (or group of persons) who knows the student.

2. Decision about accommodations is based on the student's current level of functioning and learning characteristics.

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3. Form is used that lists the variables to consider in making accommodation decisions and that documents for each student the decision and reasons for it.

4. Accommodation guidelines require alignment of instructional accommodations and assessment accommodations.

5. Decision about accommodations is not based on program setting, category of disability, or percent time in the mainstream classroom.

6. Decision about accommodations is documented on the student's IEP or on an additional form that is attached to the IEP.

7. Parents are informed about accommodation options and about the implications of their child (1) not being allowed to use needed accommodations, or (2) being excluded from the accountability system when certain accommodations are used.

These criteria are reflected in the checklist provided in Appendix B.

CRITERION 3: State or district has appropriate written guidelines for the **reporting** of assessment results for students with disabilities for large-scale assessments used for accountability purposes.

Markers for Criterion 3. The written guidelines include statements that indicate:

1. Written policy exists about who is included when calculating participation or exclusion rates.

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2. Rates of exclusion that are specific to students with disabilities, and reasons for the exclusion, are reported when assessment results are reported.

3. Data reports include information from all test takers.

4. Records are kept so that data for students with disabilities could be reported separately, overall, or by other breakdowns.

5. Records are kept of the use of accommodations by students with disabilities, by type of accommodation, so that the information could be reported either by individual student or in aggregate.

6. Parents are informed about the reporting policy for their child's data.

These criteria are reflected in the checklist provided in Appendix C.

Selected Examples and Nonexamples of the Criteria

As noted previously, state guidelines are highly variable. It was this discovery that prompted NCEO to create the criteria presented here. While some of the characteristics of state policies promote the participation of students with disabilities in assessments (i.e., are "appropriate" practice), others tend to discourage it. For example, Marker 2 for **Criterion 1** is "Premise exists that all students, including students with disabilities, are to participate in the district or state accountability system." An example and nonexample of this marker follows:

Example of guidelines with this marker:

"For students with disabilities, each student's IEP committee determines on an individual basis how the students will be included in the assessment program. There are three options for inclusion . . ."

Example of guidelines without this marker:

"Students identified as having a handicapping condition may be exempted from taking the tests."

While some characteristics of state policies promote the participation of students with disabilities, others tend to discourage it.

Marker 2 for **Criterion 1** is "Decision about participation is to be made by a person (or a group of people) who knows the student." An example and nonexample of this marker follows:

Example of guidelines with this marker:

"It is the role of the [IEP team] to determine if an exemption from the general proficiency testing is warranted and if it is so determined, what assessment criteria will be used as the basis for awarding a state endorsed diploma."

Example of guidelines without this marker:

"The principal shall carry out the statewide testing program as prescribed and scheduled, exempting only those who fall into one or more of three categories . . ."

Criterion 2 has a similar marker (Marker 1) for making decisions about accommodations: "Decision about accommodations is to be made by . . ." An example and nonexample of this marker follows:

Example of guidelines with this marker:

"The school [IEP team] should make or review accommodation decisions as part of the development or annual review of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students with disabilities; document the decisions; and include the accommodations in or with the IEP."

Example of guidelines without this marker:

"The preceding modifications are authorized, when determined appropriate by the school district superintendent or designee, for any student who has been determined to be an eligible exceptional student . . . and has a current individual educational plan, or who has been determined to be a handicapped person."

Another example and nonexample are related to Marker 2 for **Criterion 2** ("Decision about accommodations is based on the student's current level of functioning and learning characteristics"):

Example of guidelines with this marker:

"The appropriate accommodations for any given student will be specific to that child's needs addressed with the IEP . . . With the accommodations the test should be a reflection of the student's strengths and weaknesses in the area tested, not a reflection of the disability addressed in the IEP."

Example of guidelines without this marker:

"The video-cassette modification is only available for hearing impaired students . . . Testing in a separate room is available for students classified as behaviorally emotionally handicapped, educable mentally handicapped, hearing impaired, orthopedically impaired, specific learning disabled, traumatic brain injured, or visually impaired . . ."

Although NCEO did not specifically ask states to send guidelines about reporting of assessment results for accountability assessments, information about reporting practices was taken from the existing participation and accommodations documents. Twenty-three states had information on reporting policies in these documents. Marker 3 states "Data reports include information from all test takers." While there are examples of this marker, some states make direct reference to students with disabilities and their exclusion from the reports of assessment results.

> ***Example of guidelines with this marker:***
>
> "Is there any way to exclude Special Education students from the [test] summaries? No. The [test] summary information includes every student tested."
>
> ***Some states specifically indicate that scores from students with disabilities will be excluded from score aggregations. Examples of this approach:***
>
> "Scores of all students who are administered the [test] will be aggregated into the school report with the following exceptions: A student who is excluded or misses one or more sections of the test battery. A student enrolled in a Composite or Self-Contained Special Education Program..."

Another example and nonexample are related to Marker 1 for **Criterion 3** (Written policy exists about who is included when calculating participation or exclusion rates"):

> ***Example of guidelines with this marker:***
>
> "The percentage of students at each proficiency level will be based on the number of students enrolled in the grade being assessed, rather than the number of students participating in the assessment. The number and percentage of students excluded from the assessment will also be reported."

Example of guidelines without this marker:

[Guidelines without this marker simply make no statement about a participation definition.]

Summary

The day of inclusive accountability systems is upon us. We now know much more about assessment practices across the nation than ever before (Bond & Roeber, 1995, 1996; Erickson, Thurlow, Thor, & Seyfarth, 1996). Today we are faced with the question, "Are all students learning?" The means to answering this question lies in inclusive assessment and accountability systems.

Today we are faced with the question, "Are all students learning?" The means to answering this question lies in inclusive assessment systems.

The issues of participation and accommodation for students with disabilities in district and state assessments have received much attention from states. Nearly every state is in the process of reviewing and revising its state guidelines in these areas. Many states have demonstrated exemplary efforts in including students with disabilities in the on-going reformation of assessment programs. In fact, more and more, states are beginning to develop alternate assessments for those students who are not capable of participating in the traditional district and statewide assessment. The use of assessment accommodations in assessments is prevalent, but inconsistent.

There remains much work to be done in the area of information dissemination and discussion about why all students with disabilities should be included in assessments and provided with accommodations, if deemed appropriate. Parents, teachers, administrators and Boards of Education need to have information about how all students are learning in their respective schools and districts. Included in the word "all" are students with disabilities. The overarching issue is accountability. We know all students are not able to participate in traditional district and statewide assessments, but they all can participate in the accountability system.

The current issue of reporting of assessment results is one that states and organizations are now beginning to tackle. Efforts are being made to level the playing field for states and districts by developing policies that reflect inclusive reporting of students who do and do not participate in district and state assessments. Methods of reporting are being discussed. The issues of technical adequacy and the impact of assessment accommodations are being vigorously studied; however, until we are able to gain more information on all these assessment issues, NCEO recommends the following:

1. **When in doubt, include students with disabilities in assessments.**

2. **When in doubt, provide students with disabilities the assessment accommodation in question.**

3. **Report the data of all test takers and account for those who are excluded.**

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APPENDIX A

Checklist for Participation Decisions

Use the checklist below to guide evaluation, revisions and/or development of district or state assessment guidelines for participation. Consider each marker and place a check in the Yes or No column.

CRITERION 1: District or State has appropriate written guidelines for the participation of students with disabilities in assessments used for accountability

Markers:

Yes	No		
____	____	1.	Premise exists that all students, including all students with disabilities, are to participate in large-scale assessments used for accountability systems.
____	____	2.	Decision about participation is made by a person (or a group of people) who knows the student.
____	____	3.	Decision about participation is based on the student's current level of functioning and learning characteristics.
____	____	4.	Form is used that lists the variables to consider in making the participation decisions.
____	____	5.	Reason(s) for exclusion are documented.
____	____	6.	Student must participate in an assessment if the student receives any instruction on content assessed, regardless of where instruction occurs.
____	____	7.	Decision about participation is not based on the program setting, category of disability, or percentage of time in the mainstream classroom.
____	____	8.	Decision about participation allows for some students to participate in an alternate assessment or, when appropriate, in part of an assessment or assessment procedure.

___ ___ 9. Decision guidelines recognize that only a small percentage of students with disabilities need to participate in an alternate assessment (e.g., those with severe disabilities, <1-2% of all students) or, when appropriate, to participate in a part of an assessment or assessment procedure.

___ ___ 10. Parents understand participation options and implications of their child **not** being included in the assessment.

___ ___ 11. Decisions about participation is documented on the student's IEP or on an additional form that is attached to the IEP.

APPENDIX B

Checklist for Accommodation Decisions

Use the checklist below to guide evaluation, revisions and/or development of district or state assessment guidelines for providing assessment accommodations. Consider each marker and place a check in the Yes or No column.

CRITERION 2: District or State has appropriate written guidelines for the use of accommodations by students with disabilities in assessments used for accountability

Markers:

Yes	No		
____	____	1.	Decision about accommodations is made by a person (or group of persons) who knows the student.
____	____	2.	Decision about accommodations is based on the student's current level of functioning and learning characteristics.
____	____	3.	Form is used that lists the variables to consider in making the accommodation decisions and that documents for each student the decision and reasons for it.
____	____	4.	Accommodation guidelines require alignment of instructional accommodations and assessment accommodations.
____	____	5.	Decision about accommodations is <u>not</u> based on program setting, category of disability, percent time in the mainstream classroom.
____	____	6.	Decision about accommodations is documented on the student's IEP or on an additional form that is attached to the IEP.
____	____	7.	Parents are informed about accommodation options and about the implications of their child (1) not being allowed to use needed accommodations, or (2) being excluded from the accountability system when certain accommodations are used.

APPENDIX C

Checklist for Reporting Assessment Results

Use the checklist below to guide evaluation, revisions and/or development of district or state assessment guidelines for reporting of assessment results. Consider each marker and place a check in the Yes or No column.

CRITERION 3: District or State has appropriate written guidelines for the reporting of assessment results for students with disabilities assessments used for accountability

Markers:

Yes	No		
____	____	1.	Written policy exists about who is included when calculating participation or exclusion rates.
____	____	2.	Rates of exclusion that are specific to students with disabilities, and reasons for the exclusion, are reported when assessment results are reported.
____	____	3.	Data reports include information from all test takers.
____	____	4.	Records are kept so that data for students with disabilities could be reported separately, overall, or by other breakdowns.
____	____	5.	Records are kept of the use of accommodations by students with disabilities, by type of accommodation, so that the information could be reported either by individual student or in aggregate.
____	____	6.	Parents are informed about the reporting policy for their child's data.

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